

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1 – 15 (canceled)

16. (currently amended) A method of distinguishing whether a patient has been exposed to ~~BCG or to *M. tuberculosis*~~ a virulent strain of the *M. tuberculosis* complex, the method comprising:

contacting said patient or a sample derived therefrom with a polypeptide encoded by a ~~deletion marker of Table 1, wherein said deletion marker is present in *M. tuberculosis* and absent in BCG~~ nucleotide sequence comprising the open reading frame Rv2653c (SEQ ID NO: 93) or a polypeptide encoded by a nucleotide fragment of at least 25 contiguous nucleotides of SEQ ID NO: 93; and

determining the presence of an immune reaction to said polypeptide, wherein a positive response is indicative of exposure to a virulent strain of the *M. tuberculosis* complex ~~*M. tuberculosis*~~.

17. (original) The method of Claim 16, wherein said contacting step comprises sub-cutaneous injection of said polypeptide.

18. (original) The method of Claim 16, wherein said contacting step is performed *in vitro* and said sample comprises a blood sample or derivative thereof.

19 – 23 (canceled)

24 (new). The method according to claim 17, wherein said polypeptide is injected at a dose of from 0.05 µg to 5 µg.

25 (new). The method according to claim 24, wherein the site of injection is examined for the presence of a wheal, indicative of said positive response.

26 (new). The method according to claim 16, wherein said determining step comprises:  
detecting binding of an antibody to said polypeptide, said binding being an indication that said subject is infected by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* or is diseased with *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.

27. (new) The method according to claim 16, wherein said polypeptide is a fusion protein

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comprising the polypeptide sequence encoded by SEQ ID NO:93 or comprising the polypeptide sequence encoded by a nucleotide fragment of at least 25 nucleotides of SEQ ID NO: 94.

28. (new) A method of distinguishing whether a patient has been exposed to a virulent strain of the M. tuberculosis complex, the method comprising:

contacting said patient or a sample obtained therefrom with a polypeptide or polypeptide fragment encoded by a nucleotide sequence set forth in the open reading frame Rv2653c (SEQ ID NO:93); and

determining the presence of an immune reaction to said polypeptide, wherein a positive response is indicative of exposure to a virulent strain of the M. tuberculosis complex.